



# Dispatches from the Musical/Pedagogical Frontier



CBDNA North Central Division Conference  
The Ohio State University

April 6, 2024 | 8:40 a.m.  
TMV Recital Hall N120

The Ensemble Performance Lab at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln was founded in August 2019 after more than a decade of research and development. Its philosophy and modus operandi spring from an understanding of the purpose and potential of ensembles that is completely different than the standard model. Those unfamiliar with the Lab might benefit from the notes posted here: <https://www.carolyn-barber.com/> This session is designed to provide a brief overview of the Lab (what it is, how it works), a sense of why we feel it is an essential component of a musician's education in the twenty-first century, a synopsis of the most surprising discoveries from the first four years, a description of the "new normal" that has emerged, and some thoughts on where we might explore next.

## The Founding Questions

- ❖ What if we approach ensembles in school settings not as gigs, nor as pre-professional pseudo-gig training opportunities, nor as credit-earning social, entertainment, and/or service activities, but as actual classes?
- ❖ What if repertoire isn't the curriculum?
- ❖ What if ensemble classes focused on ensembleship rather than simply applying individual musicianship to various compositions? (*i.e. The Deal*)
- ❖ What if we defined ensembleship in teachable terms and developed pedagogical tools as we have for musicianship?
- ❖ What if the conductor were not the primary interpreter? How might that role be reimagined to enable the entire team to explore freely while respecting the composer's intentions?
- ❖ What if the traditional hierarchical scaffold supporting ensemble work were removed in favor of a flexible, infinitely adaptable alternative? What if creative responsibility were distributed across the entire team (composer, conductor, and players)?
- ❖ What if we explore far outside the established boundaries of musical inquiry and seek new models and techniques in nature, biology, sociology, theater, architecture, physics, culinary art, history, philosophy...? What tools would we need to do that?

## The Presenter

Carolyn Barber is the Ron and Carol Cope Professor and Director of Bands at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, a post she has held since 2001. For those in need of a cure for insomnia, her vital academic statistics can be found here: <https://arts.unl.edu/music/faculty/carolyn-barber> Email to exchange questions or ideas: [cbarber2@unl.edu](mailto:cbarber2@unl.edu)

# The Founding Metaphor



Mindfulness

+ Intention

+ Inclusion

.....Ensembleship

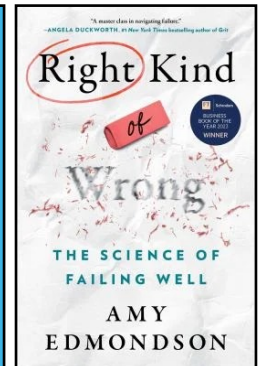
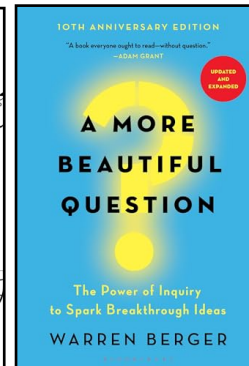
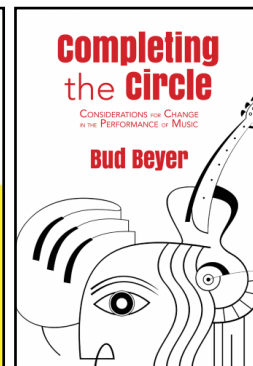
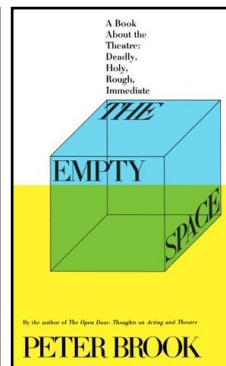
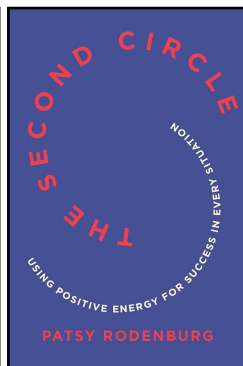
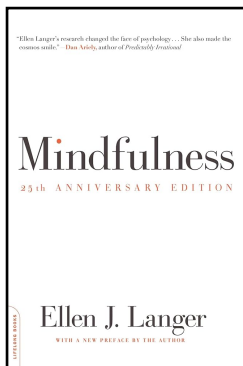


That which enables groups of individuals with different points of view, different motivations, different roles, different information, different intentions, and different values to operate together to create shared meaning.

Musicians in an ensemble function optimally when flocking (as starlings in a murmuration). Four basic rules support this behavior:

1. Separation - avoid crowding neighbors (divergence of point of view/perspective)
2. Cohesion - steer towards average position of neighbors (convergence w/in compositional parameters)
3. Alignment - steer towards average heading of neighbors (shared context/frame)
4. Marginal Opacity - Get as close as you can to others but be sure you can see out of the flock in many directions (soften focus to include multiple streams of information, other trends and currents, listen for patterns rather than one-to-one matches)

The Lab is not about alternative rehearsal techniques.  
It is an alternative concept of how and why ensembles operate.



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